



PHA Guidebook to Ending Homelessness

Introduction

Across the country, a growing number of public housing authorities (PHAs) have become integral to their community's efforts to prevent and end homelessness. This willingness to partner and engage in collaborative planning is critical to both local and national success in ending homelessness.

The guidebook is composed of three major sections. First, the [Planning section](#) gives guidance to PHAs on how to collaborate and align resources to best prevent and end homelessness. The [Programs and Policies section](#) provides a detailed summary of best practices and policies for PHAs to increase access to housing. Finally, the [Partnership section](#) details how partnering with a variety of organizations can make a substantial impact on ending homelessness.

Each section contains information on where PHAs can implement the specific practice being discussed and who exactly PHAs can aid with that practice. Also, each section contains actual examples of the discussed practice in action by organizations across the United States.

Additional Resources

For more information on how PHAs can help end homelessness, visit the following resources:

- [HUD Public and Indian Housing: Ending and Preventing Homelessness](#): HUD's webpage consolidates guidance and resources for PHAs on how they can help end and prevent homelessness.
- [CSH's PHA Toolkit](#): The Corporation for Supportive Housing's PHA Toolkit is a guide to how PHAs can work with service providers to create supportive housing opportunities for the people who need them most.
- [Housing Authorities: Essential Partners in Ending Homelessness](#): The Council of Large Public Housing Authorities' publication demonstrates exactly how PHAs are essential to ending homelessness through a variety of practices.

Planning

PHAs play a unique role in providing affordable housing to extremely low-income households in their communities, and many have collaborated with community partners to determine how their resources can be used strategically to best support and align with efforts to prevent and end homelessness. Two of the most important ways that PHAs can participate in collaborative planning to end homelessness is through participation in a funder collaborative and in a Continuum of Care.

Participating in a Funder Collaborative

Background

By participating in funder collaboratives, PHAs can significantly increase the impact of their resources and programs, by connecting housing assistance to other investments in affordable housing and funding the delivery of the services often needed by people experiencing homelessness.

Frequently, a single public agency does not control funding that can be used for all of the elements or costs of strategies that are needed to prevent and end homelessness. Nonprofit providers of housing and services must go separately to dozens of funders, and they often need to secure funds from a multitude of funding sources to launch new programs or complete supportive housing projects. A funder collaborative links critical funding resources to achieve a common set of goals and may disburse those funds on the basis of a single, streamlined application process.

The collaborative itself is a formal partnership among public agencies or private funders, such as foundations, or both. It is designed to align and leverage the resources of the partners to maximize the impact of their dollars and create a more predictable and efficient system of funding, making it possible for organizations to implement new or expanded programs and projects more quickly and achieve their outcomes faster.

PHAs can contribute to funder collaboratives by contributing housing resources, such as vouchers. In turn, other partners in the collaborative can pair the housing subsidy with other resources, including security deposit assistance, case management, or healthcare, to help people experiencing homelessness achieve housing stability.

Where Can PHAs Do This?

All PHAs can participate in funder collaboratives to significantly increase the impact of their resources and programs.

Who Can PHAs Assist?

Funder collaboratives can be developed to coordinate investments in housing and services that are matched to the needs of different groups of people who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness, including families, youth, Veterans, and people experiencing chronic homelessness.

Additional Resources

- An evaluation report prepared for the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation's Chronic Homelessness Initiative describes lessons learned from the implementation of the [Home for Good Funders Collaborative](#).
- The [Grantmakers for Effective Organizations](#) website provides useful links to several resources that describe lessons learned in the implementation of funder collaboratives.
- Funders Together to End Homelessness is a national network for grantmakers working to end homelessness. The [Funders Together website](#) provides useful tools and resources that can help to guide the work of funder collaboratives.

Examples

- The **King County Housing Authority** and the **Seattle Housing Authority** both participate in the King County Combined Funders Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) process. The combined NOFA process coordinates the application and allocation for public and private funding for proposals that meet the goals of the Ten-Year Plan to End Homelessness in King County. Both housing authorities commit resources, primarily by creating a preference for homeless persons using Housing Choice Vouchers that are paired with supportive services through the combined NOFA. Resources from the housing authorities are used in combination with resources from other public and private funders, including the City of Seattle, King County, United Way, and foundation funding allocated through Building Changes, a non-profit intermediary organization. The leadership of the PHAs and their willingness to create a preference for housing resources, have been critical to bringing other partners and funding into the collaborative offering. More information, including links to NOFA announcements and application materials, which may provide useful models that can be adapted for other communities, is available at the [King County Housing and Community Development website](#).
- In Los Angeles County, the **Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles (HACLA)** and the **Housing Authority of the County of Los Angeles (HACoLA)**, participate in the Home for Good Funders Collaborative, which also includes more than 25 other city, county, and Federal agencies, foundations, and other funders. In 2012, the Home for Good Funders Collaborative released a collaborative Request for Proposals (RFP). Through the Collaborative RFP, HACLA's limited preference of 500 vouchers for chronically homeless individuals and families, and HACoLA's similar limited preference of 100 vouchers were connected to intensive support services. A total of 600 housing vouchers were committed for people experiencing chronic homelessness and linked to county-funded health and mental health services.

In addition, a pool of flexible funding from foundations was made available through the Home For Good Funders Collaborative to pay for security deposits and other move-in costs, and for supportive services, including case management and housing retention activities, for the first two years after chronically homeless persons move into permanent housing. By coordinating investments from public agencies and private funders, the Home for Good Collaborative has helped to significantly expand the availability of permanent housing solutions for chronic homelessness in Los Angeles, with linkages to the services people need to successfully exit homelessness. The involvement of the PHAs and the commitment of the housing resources are making it possible for services and private funding to have even greater impacts on clients and the community.

Participating in the Continuum of Care

Background

A Continuum of Care (CoC) is a local planning body for a defined geographic area that is responsible for establishing and operating a system to prevent and end homelessness for that area and to apply for grants under HUD's CoC Program annual grant competition.

CoC planning is a critical component of a community's efforts to end homelessness and provides communities with an opportunity to step back, critically assess capacity, and develop solutions to move

people experiencing homelessness toward permanent housing. It is also a tool for communities to develop a common vision and a set of common goals around ending homelessness.

CoC planning ideally involves stakeholders outside of the traditional homelessness system. CoCs help educate these stakeholders and get them to “buy in” and become part of the solution. A CoC is composed of representatives from various types of organizations, including nonprofit homelessness service providers, faith-based organizations, businesses, advocates, public housing agencies, and school districts.

Planning and decision making are driven by a review of Homelessness Management Information Systems (HMIS) data, which provide information on the prevalence, characteristics, and patterns of homelessness in a local community. Each CoC designates an organization, known as the “HMIS Lead,” to oversee and manage HMIS data. PHAs are strongly encouraged to participate in CoC planning processes and stakeholder meetings.

PHAs should also participate in other forms of collaborative planning, such as in implementation of local plans to end homelessness and in the development of the local consolidated plan, which is designed to help states and local jurisdictions assess their affordable housing and community development needs and market conditions, and to make data-driven, place-based investment decisions. The consolidated planning process serves as the framework for a community-wide dialogue to identify housing and community development priorities.

Active participation in these collaborative planning processes can help PHAs better assess the housing needs within the community and can help PHAs develop community partnerships that will assist with implementing housing assistance for people experiencing homelessness.

Where Can PHAs Do This?

All PHAs are encouraged to participate in collaborative planning efforts and to explore partnership opportunities with their local CoC. To find contact information for the CoC in which your PHA is located, please visit the [Continuum of Care contacts page](#).

Who Can PHAs Assist?

Collaborative planning is applicable to all populations, families with children, Veterans, youth, and other individuals who are chronically homeless, homeless, or at risk of homelessness in any community.

Additional Resource

- [HUD’s Homelessness Resource Exchange](#) has contact information for the lead CoC agency in each community.

Examples

- **The Fresno (CA) Housing Authority** is the Collaborative Applicant designee for the local CoC, the Homeless Management Information System Administrator, the lead agency for Project P4 (the local 100,000 Homes campaign) and an active partner to [Fresno First Steps Home](#), the city-sponsored nonprofit organization that has been formed to raise money and provide funding to support implementation of best practices and coordinated efforts to address homelessness. Through this participation, the housing authority has committed its own resources and leveraged other funding opportunities and service partnerships to house hundreds of people who had been living in city

encampments. Three new permanent supportive housing developments highlight a developer/property management/support services partnership between the Housing Authority and the Fresno County Department of Behavioral Health.

- The **Loudoun County Virginia PHA** is part of the county's CoC. The PHA provides the CoC with space and facilitation for monthly meetings, a coordinator, and administrative support. Through the CoC, the PHA has strengthened working relationships with nonprofit organizations that serve people experiencing homelessness. The PHA has also established a waiting list preference for homeless applicants as a direct result of its collaboration with community organizations.
- **MaineHousing** provides funding for staff to convene and support the CoC. The housing authority is the collaborative applicant and administrative arm of the CoC, and also the lead agency for the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). Housing authority staff provide leadership and support to engage community partners in using HMIS and participating in the Point in Time (PIT) Count. MaineHousing also administers other sources of funding for housing programs. For more than a decade, the agency has been making significant investments in permanent supportive housing for people who are experiencing homelessness. These investments are aligned with the goals and priorities established by the CoC and *Maine's Plan to End & Prevent Homelessness*.
- The executive director of the **Housing Authority of the City of Dallas, Texas** is on the board of the metro Dallas CoC, and she participates in regional planning efforts related to ending homelessness. Participation in collaborative planning with other community organizations has informed the housing authority's decisions to expand programs and partnerships to facilitate access to permanent housing for homeless people, and to modify tenant screening policies to reduce barriers to housing assistance for persons experiencing homelessness. The housing authority's board has agreed to dedicate project-based housing vouchers to help develop permanent supportive housing for individuals and families who are experiencing homelessness.

Programs and Policies

Many programs and policies administered by PHAs can be used to provide housing assistance to people who are experiencing homelessness. In addition, PHAs can make changes to their policies and practices in order to increase access to their housing programs and resources by individuals and families with children experiencing homelessness.

The different programs and policies outlined below will connect to more detailed information, including examples that demonstrate many ways PHAs can implement these programs and policies to help their communities end homelessness.

Administering CoC Rental Assistance (including Rapid Re-Housing)

Background

Many PHAs currently partner with non-profit organizations to provide permanent supportive housing for people with disabilities who are experiencing homelessness, including permanent supportive housing that receives assistance funded through HUD's CoC and Shelter Plus Care programs.

Through these programs, program participants receive rental assistance administered by PHAs, in conjunction with supportive services, which are provided through partnerships with other organizations.

The HEARTH Act, enacted in 2009, expands the types of permanent housing provided to persons who are experiencing homelessness and expands opportunities for PHAs to apply for and administer rental assistance through HUD's CoC Program.

PHAs may apply for rental assistance funds under all types of permanent housing in the CoC Program. These opportunities are described in more detail in the [Introductory Guide to the Continuum of Care Program](#). The CoC Program funds two types of permanent housing:

1. **Permanent Supportive Housing** is housing in which supportive services are provided to assist homeless persons with a disability live independently. The type of rental assistance available under this program component through the CoC Program is long-term (more than 24 months) tenant-based, sponsor-based, or project-based rental assistance.
2. **Rapid Re-Housing** is housing that assists individuals and families who are unsheltered, staying in emergency shelters or other places not meant for human habitation, with or without disabilities, move as quickly as possible into permanent housing and achieve stability in that housing. The type of rental assistance available under this program component through the CoC Program funds is short-term (up to 3 months) and/or medium-term (4 to 24 months) tenant-based rental assistance to homeless households.

HUD has published a guide, [Rapid Re-Housing: ESG vs. CoC](#), which describes ways in which HUD's CoC Program funding may be used by PHAs or other eligible recipients to provide tenant-based rental assistance for Rapid Re-Housing programs.

The types of rental assistance eligible under the CoC Program that can be applied for and administered by a PHA (within the parameters described above) are:

- **Tenant-Based Rental Assistance (TBRA):** Program participants select any appropriately sized unit within the CoC's geographic area, although PHAs may restrict the location under certain circumstances to ensure the availability of the appropriate supportive services. Program participants retain their rental assistance if they move within the CoC's geographic area.
- **Sponsor-Based Rental Assistance (SBRA):** Program participants must reside in housing owned or leased by a sponsor organization and arranged through a contract between the PHA and the sponsor organization. Program participants retain their rental assistance so long as they reside in housing owned or leased by a sponsor organization. These forms mirror the forms in which Section 8 /Housing Choice Voucher subsidies can be administered, with the exception that currently only PHAs with Moving to Work status are able to implement sponsor-based vouchers with Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher funding.
- **Project-Based Rental Assistance (PBRA):** Program participants must reside in housing provided through a contract with the owner of an existing structure whereby the owner agrees to lease subsidized units to program participants. Program participants may not retain their rental assistance if they relocate to a unit outside the project.

Each program participant, on whose behalf rental assistance payments are made, must pay a contribution toward rent consistent with the requirements of [the CoC Program interim rule](#).

Where Can PHAs Do This?

All PHAs are eligible to apply for CoC Program funding and may administer rental assistance provided through the CoC Program. Suggested for:

- PHAs with prior experience administering programs, such as funding that was previously awarded through HUD's S+C Program, CoC Program, or the Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program (HPRP) that have linked rental housing assistance with support services and referral networks.
- PHAs collaborating with a local CoC to make changes needed to meet HUD requirements established to implement the requirements of the CoC Program.

Who Can PHAs Assist?

- Rental assistance for permanent supportive housing is most appropriate for persons experiencing chronic homelessness and other people who are experiencing homelessness who have the most significant barriers to housing stability.
- Short-term and medium-term rental assistance provided through programs that use a rapid re-housing approach is most appropriate for families experiencing homelessness and for persons with moderate barriers to housing stability.
- Short-term rental assistance can also be used effectively as a bridge to a permanent housing subsidy (e.g., HUD-VASH voucher or Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher) when a permanent subsidy is not immediately available for the chronically homeless and others experiencing homelessness who have the most significant barriers to housing stability.

Additional Resources

- The [CoC Program landing page](#) provides information on program regulations, guides, and online training materials.
- The [Introductory Guide to the Continuum of Care Program](#) provides important information about HUD's CoC Program and the CoC Program interim rule. The Guide contains details about program components, requirements, rental assistance costs, and critical changes in the program.
- The Corporation for Supportive Housing has created a [PHA toolkit](#) that contains information and examples of PHAs that have implemented permanent supportive housing, often using rental assistance provided through HUD's Homeless Assistance Grants Programs. Generally, these programs and program models are likely to be sustained and replicated with funding that PHAs can receive or administer through the CoC Program.

Establishing Waitlist Preferences

Background

Access to Public Housing and Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers (HCV) can help prevent and end homelessness for families and individuals with extremely low incomes, but federal funding is limited. Nationally, PHAs can assist only about one of every four eligible households, and waiting lists are often very long.

Many PHAs have decided to utilize waiting list preferences to target housing assistance to the most vulnerable people in their community, including families and individuals who are experiencing homelessness.

In June 2013, HUD [provided guidance](#) on housing individuals and families experiencing homelessness through the Public Housing and Housing Choice Voucher programs. This guidance includes strategies to expand such housing opportunities, including strategies for waiting list management and homeless admissions preferences.

Flexibility

All PHAs have significant flexibility in establishing procedures and priorities for waiting lists and tenant selection, within the overall framework provided by federal law. Each PHA is required to establish an Annual Plan that describes the PHA's approach to meeting local housing needs among low- and very low-income people. The PHA Plan describes eligibility for housing assistance and tenant screening and selection criteria.

PHAs must ensure that 75% of households admitted into the voucher program and 40% of households admitted into public housing each year are extremely low income. Beyond those requirements, PHAs can establish policies for managing their waiting lists: for example, PHAs can select households on their waiting list on a first-come, first-served basis or through a lottery.

Many PHAs establish priorities or "preferences" for households with particular needs, including households experiencing homelessness, who are applying for or are on waiting lists for public housing or voucher assistance or both. Changes to local preferences must be based on local housing needs and priorities as identified by generally accepted data sources, such as the Point in Time count and Census data, and information gathered through the PHA Plan public comment process.

PHAs are encouraged to work with local organizations to establish a system of preferences that are informed by goals established through a collaborative planning process, such as a community's Plan to End Homelessness or the Continuum of Care planning. Federal law places some constraints on such local preferences; for example, they may not conflict with fair housing law.

Closed Waiting Lists

Some PHAs have closed their waiting lists because the list is already long and may stretch for several years. If a PHA has a closed waiting list, preferences, such as homeless preferences, may be applied only to applicants who are already on waiting lists for housing assistance.

This situation can make it difficult for PHAs to collaborate in implementing a [Housing First](#) strategy to move people experiencing homelessness into permanent housing as quickly as possible. To overcome this challenge, some PHAs have amended their PHA Plan to allow the PHA to open the waiting list only for applicants who qualify for a specific preference, such as those who are experiencing homelessness.

PHAs can also put limitations on certain preferences. A PHA may choose to limit the time period that the waiting list remains open for people who qualify for the preference (which could be a year or more). In addition, or as an alternative, a PHA may establish a “limited preference” for a specific number of applicants. If desired, limited preferences can also be tied to a specific initiative designed to create housing opportunities for individuals or families experiencing homelessness.

Implementation Tips

- Community partners who are advocating for a PHA to adopt or make changes to waiting list preferences need to understand the pressures and competing demands facing PHAs. Nearly all PHAs face significant competing demands for a limited supply of housing vouchers and units in public housing developments. Some have thousands of people on waiting lists, and many have closed their waiting lists to potential applicants.

Efforts to engage PHAs as partners may be more successful when advocates for people experiencing homelessness acknowledge the scale of a community’s unmet needs for affordable housing, partner to develop a shared vision for expanding housing opportunities for the most vulnerable people, and work together to ensure that PHA leaders will be supported when they make tough decisions about priorities.

- PHAs are encouraged to develop a strong partnership with the Continuum of Care (CoC) and local homeless service providers. CoCs and service providers can benefit the PHA by identifying and “pre-qualifying” eligible people who are experiencing homelessness, making referrals to PHAs, and making supportive services available to households that qualify for PHA waiting list preferences. Community partners may also provide assistance with the PHA’s application process, and they can help find qualified applicants when a housing unit or voucher is available, as well as helping with housing search, move-in costs, and providing furniture, food and other essentials.
- PHAs often collaborate with community partners to make supportive services available to households who qualify for preferences. The most effective service partners typically have demonstrated ability to deliver services in scattered-site settings and build effective relationships with housing owners and property managers. Service partners often have access to other sources of funding to help pay for these supportive services. The types, intensity, and duration of supportive services should be determined based on needs. Depending on the target population and the needs of households receiving assistance, services may be time limited.

Where Can PHAs Do This?

All PHAs can establish preferences for their waiting lists for public housing and/or Housing Choice Vouchers.

Who Can PHAs Assist?

- PHAs can establish a wide range of local preferences. Some examples include preferences for Veterans, people with disabilities, people who are homeless, chronically homeless people, and people who are moving on from permanent supportive housing or transitional housing. PHAs may also establish waiting list preferences for victims of domestic violence. PHA policies that provide access to safe, affordable, permanent housing, and partnerships with providers of services for domestic violence victims can help to prevent homelessness for victims and their families.

- As described in Notice PIH 2013-15, PHAs can create such preferences or limited preferences specifically for people who are referred by a partnering homeless services organization or consortia of such organizations. However, a PHA may not limit the source of referrals to an agency, organization, or consortia that denies its services to members of any federally protected class under fair housing laws—race, color, religion, national origin, sex, disability, or familial status.

Additional Resources

- [CSH's PHA Toolkit](#) includes profiles of several PHAs that have established waiting list preferences for persons experiencing homelessness. These PHAs have established partnerships with community organizations to identify, refer, and provide ongoing support services, as needed, to people who qualify for housing assistance based on these preferences.
- See also the [federal rules](#) regarding local preferences for public housing programs.

Examples

- **The Housing Authority of the City of Asheville, NC (HACA)** actively participates in the community's 10-year plan to end homelessness and ongoing collaboration meetings with community partners. This collaboration led to the design and implementation of preferences for individuals experiencing homelessness that were established for HACA's Public Housing and Housing Choice Voucher programs. Initially, the preference was limited to chronically homeless individuals, but has been expanded to those who have been homeless for more than 90 days. Ongoing case management is a key component. A profile with more information, including specific language included in the HACA Annual Plan, is included in the [Corporation for Supportive Housing's PHA Toolkit](#).
- **The Loudoun County Virginia PHA** amended its administrative plan to establish a waiting list preference for persons experiencing homelessness. As housing vouchers become available through turnover, every tenth (10th) voucher is made available to a person who is homeless. The PHA is administered by the Loudoun County Department of Family Services. The County found that when a housing voucher is provided to a person experiencing homelessness, this provides stability and an opportunity for the person to focus on other issues and solve medical or other problems. This has an impact on reducing the person's need for other administered services.
- **MaineHousing** has given people experiencing homelessness a preference for Housing Choice Vouchers, meaning that they are given extra points that help them access the waiting list for Housing Choice Vouchers. In addition, there are preferences in order of priority for victims of domestic violence, veterans and homeless families of two or more, disabled, elderly and individuals. Preferences are cumulative, meaning that a victim of domestic violence or veteran experiencing homelessness would have a higher preference than a family of two or more, an elderly person, or a person with disabilities who is experiencing homelessness but who is not eligible for another preference.
- In response to data analysis that identified approximately 1,000 to 1,200 individuals experiencing homelessness who are frequent users of emergency departments, the **Ann Arbor Housing Commission** jointly applied for a grant from the Corporation for Supportive Housing with Catholic Social Services, Avalon Housing Inc., Packard Health Clinic, the Shelter Association of Washtenaw County, the University of Michigan Health Services, among others. With this grant, these partners are linking supportive and health services with housing resources provided by the Ann Arbor Housing Commission. These

resources were made possible by the Commission's adoption of a limited preference that makes available public housing and Housing Choice Vouchers available for up to 40 individuals identified as high utilizers of crisis health services.

Eviction Prevention Strategies

Background

PHA-assisted households, who are typically extremely low-income and often have disabilities, are particularly vulnerable to homelessness if they are evicted. Additionally, when PHAs terminate assistance, such households not only lose affordable housing but may also become ineligible to return to public housing or receive other types of housing assistance in the future.

PHAs can balance enforcement of rules and responsible property management with efforts to prevent homelessness by partnering with service providers to help ensure that vulnerable households are provided with the support they need to successfully maintain housing. PHAs have considerable discretion in determining their policies regarding evictions from public housing and the termination of assistance for tenants who participate in the Housing Choice Voucher Program.

Federal law and HUD regulations specify only limited instances in which a PHA **must** terminate assistance or evict a household. Outside of these instances, a PHA or owner **may** evict a household only for serious or repeated violations of lease requirements. Many of the policies for termination of assistance and eviction, including those related to non-payment of rent or housekeeping standards, are at the discretion of the PHA or owner.

Evictions are costly for PHAs and for landlords participating in the voucher program. Additionally, these evictions can have negative consequences, including homelessness, not only for the individual who is responsible for violating lease conditions or program rules, but also for other household members who were not responsible for the behavior that led to the termination of assistance.

In June 2013, HUD issued [PIH Notice 2013-15: Guidance on housing individuals and families experiencing homelessness through the Public Housing and Housing Choice Voucher \(HCV\) programs](#). In this notice, HUD encourages PHAs to review their termination and eviction policies in light of their discretionary authority. Individual considerations should be the basis for a PHA's decision to evict or terminate assistance to a household.

Before deciding to evict or terminate assistance to a household, PHAs should consider a range of relevant circumstances and factors, including the seriousness of the case, the effect of eviction on the entire household, mitigating circumstances related to the disability of a family member, and the possibility that the offending behavior can be resolved through the mediation of community service providers.

For example, a PHA may work with a tenant to set up a rent repayment plan that allows the tenant to spread out payments for missed rent over a period of several months. For tenants who may be having difficulty complying with housekeeping standards, a supportive services partner may be able to offer help with clean up and reducing clutter, in order to prevent eviction.

Additionally, PHAs can work with landlords either directly or through community partners to mediate landlord-tenant conflicts before they lead to eviction.

Implementation Tips

- **Understand the requirements of federal law, and the flexibility for PHAs to adopt reasonable policies.**

For example, federal law requires all PHAs to establish standards for occupancy in public housing and assistance in the HCV program whereby the PHA **may** evict a family if a household member's use of illegal drugs or the use of alcohol that interferes with the health, safety, or right to peaceful enjoyment of the premises by other residents. While PHAs *can* evict entire households for the activities of any member or the household, they are not *required* to do so.

In fact, HUD encourages PHAs to consider a range of factors before deciding to evict/terminate assistance. PHAs may consider relevant circumstances such as the seriousness of the case, the effect of eviction on family members not involved in the action that led to a potential eviction, and the willingness of the head of household to remove the wrongdoing household member from the lease in exchange for continued occupancy.

- **Establish collaborative partnerships.** PHAs should consider partnering with community providers that can provide housing stabilization supports and case management services to help tenants address problem behaviors, such as noise, disruptive visitors, or housekeeping issues that can result in lease violations. This is often a cost-effective alternative to eviction.

Additionally, PHAs with Moving to Work status can sponsor-base a portion of their vouchers. In sponsor-based arrangements, a non-profit organization holds a master lease and can work directly with landlords to prevent evictions.

- **Protect victims of domestic violence.** PHAs should be aware of protections for the victims of domestic violence to ensure that they do not face eviction because of lease violations committed by their abusers. The [Violence Against Women Act](#) protects victims of domestic violence, dating violence or stalking from eviction or termination of assistance resulting from acts of violence perpetuated against them.

Where Can PHAs Do This?

All PHAs can adopt policies and programs designed to reduce evictions that might result in homelessness. This strategy is particularly recommended for PHAs with high numbers of evictions and communities where large numbers of families and individuals are becoming homeless or are entering the homeless services system from subsidized housing.

Who Can PHAs Assist?

- PHAs can amend their policies to make terminations a last resort for all assisted households.
- PHAs can work with community partners to provide case management and landlord mediation for public housing or HCV tenants with highly unstable housing history and/or very limited resources who are at high risk of eviction and potential homelessness.
- PHAs can also implement policies to prevent homelessness for victims of domestic violence.

Additional Resources

- [Safe at Home: a Reference Guide for Public Housing Officials on the Federal Housing Laws Regarding Admission and Eviction Standards for People with Criminal Records](#)
- [National Reentry Resource Center](#)

Examples

- **The Columbus Metropolitan Housing Authority** works with community partners to prevent homelessness for assisted households that are at risk of eviction. This can include working with case managers to address underlying issues that are creating challenges in maintaining housing, working with households during a probationary period, or moving households to another housing unit that better suits their needs.
- The **King County Housing Authority** has an eviction prevention program for all assisted households. As part of this program, the PHA has a client assistance fund that can help households that are behind on their rent or utility payments. The PHA also provides referrals to service agencies to address behavioral issues. Additionally, all property managers receive special training on eviction prevention. As a result of such efforts, the PHA evicts fewer than eight households each year.

Helping People Experiencing Homelessness Use Housing Vouchers

Background

Once issued a housing voucher, people who don't already have a place to live may have difficulty using that voucher within the local rental market. People who are experiencing homelessness may find it challenging to find available rental units that meet program standards, and which are managed by landlords who are willing to accept tenants with housing vouchers. This can be especially challenging if they have health and behavioral health conditions, poor credit, histories of contact with the criminal justice system, or prior evictions.

With some extra help, vulnerable people can successfully use vouchers to obtain housing and exit homelessness. For example, some PHAs and their service-provider organization partners have worked together to streamline the housing search process and provided assistance to make it easier for people who are experiencing homelessness to use their vouchers.

Recent studies indicate that nearly a third of households fail to successfully use their voucher to lease a unit, meaning that many of the households that have been issued vouchers are unable to use them within the timeframe allowed by the program. Vouchers are then often returned to the PHA who will provide them to another household instead. Successfully using a voucher is generally more difficult in tight rental markets with [high costs and low vacancy rates](#).

To address this problem, many PHAs have implemented strategies to improve voucher utilization success rates. Strategies that have been particularly effective include:

- Establishing ongoing relationships with landlords or property management firms that control a significant number of rental units, informing them about how the voucher program works and the

support services that will be available to program participants, engaging them as partners, and establishing a track record of supporting successful tenancies.

- Reaching out to landlords who have other tenants who are voucher holders, and asking them to share information about vacancies that can be made available to people experiencing homelessness.
- Expediting the approval process by assigning dedicated staff and completing several tasks simultaneously, rather than waiting to complete one step in the process before starting another one.
- Pre-inspecting apartments that can be made available for prospective tenants.

Some PHAs have established partnerships with organizations that provide services to people with disabilities, low-income households, and people experiencing homelessness in order to provide additional help to people who may face particular challenges in using housing vouchers. These PHAs may rely on their service partners to help people use vouchers to find housing. Successful strategies include:

- Hiring housing specialists with a background in real estate or housing who can assist people with housing search and provide coaching about where to look for housing and how to talk to potential landlords.
- Providing training for households about the rights and responsibilities of tenancy, and offering a certificate for completion of a [“ready to rent” program](#).
- Other strategies to establish and maintain strong relationships with landlords.

Strategies that streamline the process for using a housing voucher can be particularly important for engaging people experiencing chronic homelessness with an offer of housing that is available as soon as possible after the time a vulnerable person expresses acceptance of such a housing opportunity, rather than weeks or even months later.

To be even more successful in serving people experiencing unsheltered homelessness, a PHA can work in partnership with other organizations that may be able to offer short-term, interim housing opportunities. By providing a place for a person to stay while completing the housing search process, partner organizations can help make it possible for people to utilize their vouchers more efficiently.

Where Can PHAs Do This?

All PHAs that administer housing vouchers can take steps to make it easier for individuals and families experiencing or most at risk of homelessness to successfully use those vouchers. Partnerships between PHAs and community-based organizations can be used to expand PHAs’ capacity to implement effective strategies.

Who Can PHAs Assist?

All people experiencing or most at risk of homelessness often need help to use housing vouchers, particularly in communities with tight rental markets and low vacancy rates, in homes or apartments that meet voucher program standards for housing quality and are available for rent at the fair market rent level. Strategies for helping people use housing vouchers are also important for Veterans who are eligible for assistance through

the HUD-VASH program, which provides housing vouchers administered by PHAs linked to services provided by VA Medical Centers.

Additional Resources

- [HUD-VASH Best Practices – Version 1.0](#), a working document from HUD
- The 100,000 Homes Campaign has provided a [sample job description of a housing search specialist](#) on their website.
- [Rapid Re-Housing for Homeless Populations: Program and Community Strategies for Recruiting Private-Market Landlords & Overcoming Housing Barriers](#), December 2010. Beyond Shelter, HomeStart, Inc. and National Center on Housing and Child Welfare

Examples

- The **Des Moines Housing Authority** worked with the Department of Veterans Affairs to create a flyer about the HUD-VASH program and mailed it with monthly checks to landlords who were already leasing units to participants in the regular voucher program. The flyer included a description of the supportive services provided by VA case managers to help Veterans be successful tenants.
- Instead of having one department of a PHA complete the inspection to ensure an apartment meets housing quality standards and having another department negotiate rent reasonableness with a landlord, the **Long Beach Housing Authority** allows both the inspection and rent reasonableness determination to be completed at the same time. The PHA estimates that this eliminates 21 days from the leasing process for HUD-VASH.
- As part of the 100,000 Homes Campaign of Community Solutions, a national non-profit organization, organized housing placement “boot camps” to help PHAs, VA Medical Centers, and their partners map out the current housing placement process and the time required to complete each step. In a collaborative brainstorming session, the agencies re-designed the process by streamlining or combining activities and reducing steps in order to help Veterans experiencing homelessness move into housing faster.

Modifying Tenant Screening and Eligibility Policies

Background

PHA policies and procedures regarding tenant screening can be a significant obstacle for many people experiencing or at risk of homelessness, and particularly for people with disabilities who experience homelessness.

Many restrictive policies are set at the local level, are not required by federal law or regulations, and can be changed through local processes. Some PHAs have modified their tenant screening criteria and procedures in an effort to reduce barriers to housing access for people experiencing homelessness, particularly for people who have had contact with the criminal justice system as a result of problems with mental illness or substance use.

Removing Barriers

Incarceration and homelessness are highly interrelated, as difficulties in reintegrating into the community increase the risk of homelessness for released prisoners, and homelessness increases the risk for re-incarceration. Sometimes people come in contact with the criminal justice system because of behaviors related to the symptoms of untreated mental illness or other disabling conditions.

However, contrary to common assumptions, a person's criminal background does not predict whether that person will succeed or fail at staying housed. HUD has provided encouragement to PHAs, including this [letter the Secretary of HUD sent to all PHA Executive Directors](#), to review their policies related to criminal history and consider more flexible, reasonable admissions policies that balance safety concerns with the importance of providing individuals a second chance at improving their lives and becoming productive citizens.

For most PHAs, the standard approach to tenant screening is to deny housing assistance to applicants with an outstanding debt owed to the PHA or with records of prior arrests or convictions. Some PHAs use additional screening procedures and criteria, such as credit history or landlord references, and this can create barriers to housing access for persons experiencing homelessness.

Many PHAs are taking steps to modify policies and procedures in order to reduce or remove these barriers. Federal law gives substantial flexibility to PHAs and housing providers to adopt local policies regarding criminal backgrounds and other screening criteria.

Some PHAs and providers of other federally subsidized housing have adopted policies that are more restrictive than the requirements of Federal law, creating significant obstacles to housing for many people who experience chronic homelessness. While some PHAs have very restrictive policies, others have modified their policies and procedures in an effort to reduce barriers for people who have spent time in jails and prisons.

Consider Individual Factors

PHAs should consider individual factors, when making admissions decisions based on unfavorable information about an applicant. For example, in public housing or the Housing Choice Voucher program, in determining whether to deny admission because of the action of a family member that would normally screen a household out of the program, the PHA may consider all relevant circumstances.

These circumstances can include the time, nature, and seriousness of the case, the extent of participation or culpability of individual family members, mitigating circumstances related to the disability of a family member, and the effects of denial on other family members who were not involved in the action. Consideration may be given to factors that might indicate a reasonable probability of favorable future conduct, including evidence of rehabilitation and the applicant's willingness to participate in social services.

For example, some PHAs may initially deny applications for housing for all households with criminal backgrounds, but have appeal procedures that allow for a case-by-case review of circumstances, including evidence of rehabilitation.

A PHA may partner with an organization that serves people with mental illness or people experiencing homelessness, to create a non-adversarial process for considering whether a person's disability contributed to

the problems. This would be a reasonable accommodation for persons with disabilities who might otherwise be screened out of housing assistance because of a prior eviction or contact with the criminal justice system.

Through taking this information into consideration, a housing application can be approved, particularly if services and supports are available to help the person succeed as a tenant. This is another approach through which PHAs and supportive service providers may work together to make it possible to use vouchers for people experiencing homelessness.

In some communities there are [problem-solving courts](#), such as Mental Health Courts, Homeless Courts, or Veterans Courts, that provide opportunities for people experiencing homelessness to clear outstanding warrants or resolve criminal charges that could be barriers to eligibility for housing assistance.

Some people experiencing homelessness have debts they owe to the PHA that would be an obstacle to eligibility for housing assistance. PHAs and their community partners may use flexible funding to pay off these debts and remove this barrier. For example, the Salt Lake City Housing Authority used Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program funds to help families re-pay past debts to PHAs so that they could obtain rental assistance.

Where Can PHAs Do This?

All PHAs can consider making modifications to tenant screening and eligibility policies and procedures to remove barriers to housing assistance for individuals and families experiencing or most at risk of homelessness.

Who Can PHAs Assist?

Modifications of tenant screening and eligibility policies and procedures can have a large impact on removing barriers to assistance for Veterans and persons who are experiencing chronic homelessness, who have mental illness or other disabilities, including co-occurring substance use problems, and/or who have been involved with the criminal justice system.

This strategy will also reduce barriers to housing for families who are experiencing homelessness, particularly if the household includes or is seeking to reunify with a family member who has been incarcerated.

However, it is important to note that when a PHA modifies tenant screening criteria for its public housing or Housing Choice Vouchers program, it modifies screening criteria for all applicants to public housing or the Housing Choice Voucher program. Therefore, if a PHA is not comfortable or willing to revise its general screening criteria, the PHA is strongly encouraged to consider mitigating circumstances.

Additional Resources

- In June 2013, HUD issued [HUD PIH Notice 2013-15: Guidance on housing individuals and families experiencing homelessness through the Public Housing and Housing Choice Voucher programs](#). In this notice HUD notes that a PHA wishing to serve more people experiencing homelessness may consider reviewing their discretionary admission policies to determine if any changes can be made to remove barriers. The notice also provides information about how PHAs can consider relevant circumstances and other individual factors as part of the admissions process.

- In June 2011, the Secretary of HUD sent a [letter to all PHA executive directors](#), describing the laws and policies regarding screening potential tenants based on criminal activity. While the focus of this letter was primarily on ex-offenders seeking to reunify with family members living in public housing or receiving voucher assistance, the encouragement to offer a second chance to allow ex-offenders a place to live may provide a helpful signal to PHAs regarding more flexible policies that reduce barriers for people experiencing homelessness.
- The **Federal Interagency Reentry Council** also published a “[Myth Buster](#)” [fact sheet](#) clarifying federal policies regarding eligibility for housing assistance for people who have been convicted of a crime.
- **The Legal Action Center** has published [Safe at Home: A Reference Guide for Public Housing Officials on the Federal Housing Laws Regarding Admission and Eviction Standards for People with Criminal Records](#).

Examples

- The **Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles** (HACLA) modified its tenant screening policies in collaboration with advocacy organizations working to end homelessness. By making changes to local policies that were more restrictive than those required by federal law, HACLA has been able to significantly reduce barriers to using Housing Choice Vouchers for people experiencing chronic homelessness, and those who may have had contact with the criminal justice system because of behaviors related to the symptoms of mental illness or other disabilities.

Through the Section 8 Administrative Plan process, HACLA sharply reduced the number of years for denial of admission due to criminal convictions, permitted treatment options for drug and alcohol related convictions, and eliminated some kinds of criminal activity from the list of denial reasons altogether for homeless applicants. When HUD PIH-Notice 2013-15 made clear that homeless admission criteria may not differ from the standards for other applicants, HACLA amended its Administrative Plan to reduce the admission barriers for all applicants.

HACLA also created a “Moving On” preference by including an admission preference in the Housing Choice Voucher program for formerly homeless Shelter Plus Care residents who have stabilized their lives in that program and no longer require the supportive housing environment in order to maintain their housing. Transfer to the voucher program enables people who previously experienced homelessness to exercise tenant mobility and move on with their lives, and this frees up their supportive housing unit for a new person experiencing chronic homelessness who needs it.

- The **Housing Authority of the City of Dallas**, Texas revised the PHA’s tenant screening standards to conform to the federal requirements. This revision eliminated some standards that had created barriers to using PHA programs to assist people experiencing homelessness. The Housing Authority’s Executive Director participates as a member of the board that governs the Continuum of Care for Metro Dallas, and the decision was informed and motivated by her involvement in the region’s collaborative efforts to end homelessness.
- The **Seattle Housing Authority** (SHA) changed its tenant screening criteria in an effort to reduce barriers to housing for people experiencing homelessness. Before making the change, SHA had required a variable waiting period after an applicant has been released from incarceration. This waiting

period ranged from two years to 20 years, depending upon the type of offense. Instead SHA adopted a uniform time of 12 months following release from incarceration. A [profile is included in the CSH PHA toolkit](#), including the resolution adopted by SHA’s Board of Commissioners, the background memo for the Board of Commissioners explaining the rationale for the proposed policy change, and the changes SHA made to its [Administrative Plan](#).

Moving Up Strategies

Background

When people have the opportunity to move from permanent supportive housing (PSH) into another stable housing opportunity, the resulting turnover creates availability in existing PSH that can be used to serve persons experiencing chronic homelessness. These approaches, when done in a purposeful way, are referred to as “moving up” or “moving on” initiatives.

PSH is long-term, community-based housing combined with supportive services for homeless persons with disabilities. Because it is permanent housing, there are no time limits on length-of-stay. Many participants, over time, may find that they no longer need the level of supportive services that are provided while in PSH. They continue to need the housing assistance, however, so they remain in permanent supportive housing.

PHAs can choose to partner with CoCs and local homelessness service providers to make tenant-based Housing Choice Vouchers (HCV, or Section 8) available through the use of preferences for people who have achieved stability in PSH and no longer require the same level of supportive services. In turn, this creates increased turnover in limited PSH, which will allow them to permanently house other eligible households, like the chronically homeless.

One of the strategies in *Opening Doors* is to create greater incentives for individuals and families to move on from PSH as they are ready, but the lack of affordable housing stock in many communities creates barriers to making this a reality. PHAs can play an important role in allowing individuals and families to move on from PSH and into affordable housing if and when they no longer need the intensive services provided in a PSH program, particularly for households with incomes that are too low to pay for housing within the local community without ongoing rental assistance.

Because existing PSH has not always been targeted to the most vulnerable people, a move on strategy allows communities to free up existing inventory for individuals with the highest service needs, those who have been homeless for the longest time, and/or those with the greatest vulnerabilities. PHAs can work with local supportive housing providers (i.e., CoCs) to identify individuals and families that no longer need intensive support services, and offer vouchers to these households allowing them to continue receiving assistance.

Where Can PHAs Do This?

All PHAs can use waiting-list preferences to make affordable housing opportunities available to persons who are ready to move on from PSH.

This strategy is suggested for:

- Communities with a significant number of PSH units that have not been well-targeted to people with long histories of homelessness and the greatest barriers to housing stability

- Communities with large numbers of people experiencing chronic homelessness, including if many of these people are unsheltered
- Communities in which PHAs and their governing boards may be reluctant to dedicate housing opportunities or provide waiting list preferences for people who are currently experiencing homelessness, because they lack experience serving this population or have not established partnerships with service providers to meet the needs of people as they exit homelessness

These PHAs may be more comfortable providing housing opportunities for people who are ready to move on after achieving stability in PSH and are likely to need less intensive ongoing supportive services.

Examples

- The **Chicago Housing Authority** launched “Moving On,” a pilot program for persons living in PSH who no longer need intensive services and want to move to other affordable housing in the community. Applicants with stable housing histories can move on to other housing using a Housing Choice Voucher. When program participants move out of PSH, the units they vacate must be targeted to a priority population identified through Chicago’s Central Referral System. For more information about the program, see this profile in the [CSH PSH Toolkit](#).
- The **Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles** (HACLA) has created a “Moving On” preference by including an admission preference in the Housing Choice Voucher program for formerly homeless Shelter Plus Care (S+C) residents who have stabilized their lives in that program and no longer require the supportive housing environment in order to maintain their housing. Transfer to the voucher program enables people who previously experienced homelessness to exercise tenant mobility and move on with their lives, and this frees up their supportive housing unit for a new person experiencing chronic homelessness who needs it.

Project-Basing Vouchers

Background

Permanent supportive housing (PSH) combines affordable housing with services to help people experiencing homelessness who have one or more disabling conditions that complicate their ability to find and maintain housing. PSH enables them to live with stability, autonomy, and dignity. Creating successful PSH requires significant capital investments, supportive services (both case management and access to health care), and ongoing rental or operating subsidies.

Identifying resources for rental or operating subsidies is important for helping to pay for the building’s operating costs, while making housing affordable to people who have extremely low incomes, and for assembling the financing package to develop or rehabilitate housing units.

Many investors, including housing finance agencies that allocate low-income housing tax credits that help pay for capital costs consider project-based rent subsidies, which provide ongoing funding that ensures that the housing development will remain financially viable while continuing to serve extremely low income households for many years, as part of their financial underwriting and investment decisions.

Project-based vouchers are a component of a PHA's Housing Choice Voucher program. A PHA can attach up to 20 percent of its voucher assistance to specific housing units if the owner agrees to either rehabilitate or construct the units, or the owner agrees to set-aside a portion of the units in an existing development.

One approach to creating PSH is for a PHA to dedicate some Housing Choice Vouchers (HCV) and use them as project-based vouchers (PBVs) in a supportive housing development project. Many PHAs have found the PBV strategy, when paired with services provided by a community partner, is a particularly effective model for creating expanded housing opportunities for people with disabilities who are experiencing homelessness, particularly those with long histories of homelessness or significant challenges to housing stability.

The Corporation for Supportive Housing has created a [PHA Toolkit](#) that contains [information about using PBVs](#) to create and sustain permanent supportive housing. The Toolkit contains detailed information about federal program rules for PBVs, implementation tips, profiles of PHAs that have used PBVs to create successful permanent supportive housing programs, and tools that can be adapted for use by other PHAs.

Implementation Tips

- The use of PBVs can have an even stronger impact when PHAs participate in a collaborative funding process to leverage capital investments from other funders to create more efficient systems for financing and developing PSH units within the community.
- A PHA must establish written policies that specify the criteria and procedures that will be used to select housing units to which PBVs will be attached. The PHA must publicly advertise that it will accept owner proposals for the PBV program. To implement supportive housing programs, a PHA may establish policies and criteria that will result in the selection of projects that involve experienced developers and service organizations with demonstrated capacity to obtain commitments of financing and to ensure that projects can be completed successfully.
- PBVs can be used to expedite the development of stalled housing developments, enabling them to be brought to completion and occupancy more quickly.
- PBVs can also be used as part of the financing strategy for the rehabilitation of existing housing units, or to create a set-aside of PSH units as part of the rehabilitation and preservation of a community's affordable housing stock.
- PHAs that use PBVs to implement quality supportive housing developments work to ensure that these developments connect people to opportunities for community integration and provide easy access to critical resources, including public transportation, health care services, other supportive services, employment opportunities, grocery stores, and schools.

PHAs can work with their local Continuum of Care to prioritize entry into any PSH units that are subsidized with PBVs to ensure that they are targeted to people who most need a supportive housing opportunity, including the most vulnerable people experiencing homelessness and/or the highest cost users of other public systems. As more communities create efficient coordinated entry systems, PHAs can turn to those systems to ensure the appropriate referral of persons to the PSH opportunities they subsidize.

Where Can PHAs Do This?

PHAs can project-base up to 20 percent of their HCV budget authority, so this approach can be used to create PSH in any PHA that has not already exceeded this limit, if applicable. PHAs with Moving to Work status may project-base additional vouchers beyond the 20 percent limit. Also, PHAs that are participating in the Rental Assistance Demonstration program may request from HUD the authority to convert public housing, Moderate Rehabilitation (Mod Rehab), Rent Supplement, and Rental Assistance Payment properties into PBVs without counting toward the 20 percent limit. Suggested for:

- Communities with large numbers of people experiencing chronic homelessness
- Communities with housing developers who have the capacity to construct or renovate units and partner with healthcare and human services organizations
- Communities with limited PSH inventory relative to need
- Communities with tight rental markets and limited affordable housing stock

Who Can PHAs Assist?

Highly vulnerable individuals and families who are experiencing homelessness, including those who are experiencing chronic homelessness.

Additional Resources

See the HUD [FAQ on Project-Based Vouchers](#).

Sponsor-Basing Vouchers

Background

Generally, rental assistance administered by PHAs is assigned either to the tenant (“tenant-based”) or to a specific housing unit or building (“project-based”).

In a “sponsor-based” program, an organization that works with people in the community (the “sponsor”) holds the housing voucher and is able to lease a unit from the landlord on behalf of the tenant in order to help facilitate access to housing. The organization holding the voucher also delivers or facilitates access to supportive services that help the household achieve stability.

Some PHAs are “sponsor-basing” Housing Choice Vouchers, though Moving to Work status is currently required to do so.

PHAs may administer HUD Homeless Assistance Grant funding through the Continuum of Care for sponsor-based rental assistance in permanent supportive housing. Some PHAs administer state funding or other types of rental assistance programs (other than Housing Choice Vouchers), which can be used to provide sponsor-based rental assistance.

Implementation Tips

A sponsor-basing strategy can be a useful tool to provide access to housing linked to supportive services for people who have been identified as “hard to house” because of a criminal background, poor rental history, and/or very high needs for ongoing support services.

When a service provider is the sponsor holding the voucher, this may mitigate the landlord's concerns or perceived risks. Landlords may be more willing to rent units to people who are perceived as risky tenants if the service provider has a strong reputation, a track record of success in providing support for housing stability for people with disabilities and histories of homelessness, and established relationships with other owners and managers of rental properties.

Where Can PHAs Do This?

Currently only Moving to Work PHAs can sponsor-base HCVs. Some PHAs administer other funding for rental assistance programs that allow sponsor-basing rental assistance in permanent supportive housing.

Suggested for:

- PHAs that have strong relationships with service providers
- Communities with tight rental markets

Who Can PHAs Assist?

Highly vulnerable individuals and families who are experiencing homelessness, including those who are experiencing chronic homelessness.

Additional Resources

- The Corporation for Supportive Housing has created a PHA Toolkit that contains information about programs that use [sponsor-based vouchers in permanent supportive housing](#). The toolkit contains more information, including profiles of PHAs that have sponsor-based HCVs to create successful permanent supportive housing programs.

Example

- The [Oakland PATH Rehousing Initiative \(OPRI\)](#) is a sponsor-based rental assistance program developed through a partnership involving the **Oakland Housing Authority**, City of Oakland CA, Alameda County, and multiple non-profit agencies. OPRI provides housing placement and ongoing housing subsidies and supportive services for people living on the street, in encampments or emergency shelters, and vulnerable people who are at high risk of experiencing homelessness when they exit foster care or the criminal justice system. Since March 2010, OPRI has placed more than 200 people into permanent housing, using a Housing First approach.

Protecting Victims of Domestic Violence

Background

PHAs have the flexibility to implement programs and policies to provide protections to victims of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking beyond those required by the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013 to help ensure that victims of domestic violence do not become homeless as a result of being a victim of domestic violence.

PHAs should be aware that on July 6, 2013, HUD issued a notice in the Federal Register ([Docket No. FR-5720-N-01](#)) titled, The Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013: Overview of Applicability to HUD Programs. The notice provides an overview of the applicability to HUD programs of the recently enacted

Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013 (VAWA 2013). Many of the protections found in VAWA 2013 covering the Housing Choice Voucher and public housing programs may already be found in 24 CFR part 5, subpart L.

Admissions

HUD encourages PHAs to adopt admission preferences for victims of domestic violence. PHAs are reminded that being a victim of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking is not a basis for denial of assistance or admission to assisted housing if the applicant otherwise qualifies for assistance or admission (24 CFR 5.2005(b)).

Continued Occupancy

For families already receiving Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) or public housing rental assistance, PHAs must ensure that they are fulfilling the obligations of VAWA 2013. Incidents or threats of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking cannot be construed as serious or repeated violations of the lease or as “good cause” for termination of the assistance, tenancy, or occupancy rights of the victim (24 CFR 5.2005(c)(1)). Also, PHAs are encouraged to work with community partners to recognize and respond to domestic violence situations for assisted families.

Approaches PHAs Can Implement to Prevent Homelessness by Protecting Victims of Domestic Violence

Establish Collaborative Partnerships to Address Safety and Housing Needs

PHAs’ can form collaborative partnerships with domestic violence service providers to train PHA staff on understanding domestic violence and trauma, facilitate outreach and referrals, and link services to housing vouchers and developments.

Adapt Policies and Procedures

PHAs can establish policies, consistent with VAWA requirements that allow victims to get and keep safe and affordable housing and transfer to a different unit or housing development if needed, while perpetrators of violence may be evicted or barred from a housing development, or required to participate in a domestic violence prevention program as a condition of continued tenancy.

Implement Preferences

PHAs can create waiting list preferences for victims of domestic violence. If the PHA also has a preference for persons experiencing homelessness, a point system can be used to prioritize applicants for housing assistance who qualify for more than one preference. Some PHAs take this approach to expedite housing assistance (through vouchers or access to public housing units) for persons who are experiencing homelessness as a result of domestic violence.

Where Can PHAs do this?

- All PHAs can establish preferences for their wait lists for public housing and/or vouchers for victims of domestic violence.
- All PHAs can establish policies, programs, and collaborative partnerships to help prevent homelessness by preventing evictions and facilitating access to safe and affordable housing for victims of domestic violence.

- While some aspects of the program established by the Alaska Housing Finance Corporation, including time limits for voucher assistance and the ability to combine PHA voucher funding with additional state funds, can only be implemented by Moving to Work PHAs, there are other elements of the program and partnership that could be replicated by other PHAs that do not have Moving to Work status.

Who Can PHAs Assist?

- Victims of domestic violence who live in public housing or assisted housing and are at risk of homelessness or who need to relocate in order to ensure their safety
- Victims of domestic violence who experience or are at risk of homelessness

Additional Resources

- The National Housing Law Project published a comprehensive manual for advocates titled "[Maintaining Safe and Stable Housing for Domestic Violence Survivors: A Manual for Attorneys and Advocates.](#)"
- The National Housing Law Project website also provides several archived [webinars](#) that can be used as training resources for PHA staff and housing advocates. The webinars cover topics including Relocation for Domestic and Sexual Violence Survivors and VAWA's Housing Protections.
- A summary of [HUD's Final Rule](#), which implements the housing protections in VAWA.
- HUD's [Public Housing Occupancy Guidebook](#) offers a framework and tools that can be used by PHAs and their partners, including domestic violence providers, victims, and advocates working to prevent and end homelessness.

Examples

- The Stable Families Program is a partnership that includes the **Housing Authority of the City of Bridgeport** (Connecticut) and New Haven Home Recovery. The program helps families on the verge of crisis to stabilize their tenancies and avoid eviction. The program, which serves families in public housing as well as those receiving assistance through the voucher program, offers case management and supportive services, client outreach and advocacy, crisis intervention, emergency financial assistance, and help getting legal assistance and benefits, as well as other services. The program is designed to serve families that have suffered from domestic violence, as well as other risk factors such as involvement in the child welfare system, unmet mental health or substance use needs, and legal or health and safety issues. The Bridgeport Housing Authority also has an agreement with the New Haven Housing Authority to facilitate emergency transfers for victims who need to move in order to escape domestic violence while remaining in a stable, permanent housing environment. For more information, see the [Stable Families Program](#).
- In November 2012, the **Alaska Housing Finance Corporation** (AHFC) entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with the Alaska Network on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault (ANDVSA) and the State of Alaska Council on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault (CDVSA) to establish the [Empowering Choice Housing Program](#) (ECHP). The program, which hopes to assist up to 250 families a year, provides time-limited housing assistance for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault who are referred by designated victim services programs. As a MTW PHA, AHFC has the flexibility to create this unique program and combine its resources from its Housing Choice Voucher program, public housing

program, and State of Alaska capital funds. Program participants are also required to sign up for the wait lists for other types of housing assistance, which may become available by the end of the program's three-year limit. The decision to time limit the ECHP was based on the need to ensure program turnover, while also providing three solid years of assistance to participants. In the three Alaska communities AHFC serves that do not have a Housing Choice Voucher program, participants are given priority access to public housing without a time limit.

- The **Chicago Housing Authority (CHA)** has worked in partnership with HUD and other organizations to implement changes in CHA policies and procedures with the goal of improving safety for residents of public and assisted housing, while ensuring that residents can maintain their housing assistance if they need to move to escape abuse. CHA staff members have participated in training about domestic violence, and procedures have been implemented to protect the confidentiality and privacy of victims who request assistance to relocate to another public housing unit. The Safe Homes Act, which is a state law in Illinois, allows a domestic violence victim to end a lease early if needed to be safe from violence. For victims who are using Housing Choice Vouchers to lease private apartments, the CHA provides help for tenants to submit the documentation needed to terminate a lease and use the voucher to move to other housing.
- The **Chicago Housing Authority (CHA)** also re-established a waiting list preference for public housing for victims of domestic violence. Victims' advocates, legal aid attorneys, and court staff regularly ask domestic violence victims if they are on the CHA wait list. If so, they help victims submit a form certifying that the applicant is a victim of domestic violence, and the CHA is often able to provide access to a public housing unit quickly, reducing the risk that victims will become homeless because they are fleeing domestic violence.

Using Special Purpose Vouchers

Background

Since 2008, the vast majority of new federal funds for housing vouchers have been allocated via special purpose vouchers, including HUD's Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) program, the Family Unification Program (FUP), and non-elderly disabled (NED) vouchers. Funding for FUP and NED vouchers is allocated through a competitive process. For HUD-VASH, HUD and VA have awarded HUD-VASH vouchers based on geographic need and public housing agency (PHA) administrative performance every year since 2008.

The allocation process for HUD-VASH vouchers is a collaborative approach that relies on three sets of data: HUD's point-in-time data submitted by Continuums of Care (CoCs), VAMC data on the number of contacts with homeless Veterans, and performance data from PHAs and VAMCs. After determining which areas of the country have the highest number of homeless Veterans, the VA Central Office identifies VA facilities in the corresponding communities. HUD then selects PHAs near to the identified VA facilities, taking into consideration the PHAs' administrative performance, and sends the PHAs invitations to apply for the vouchers. Not all PHAs administer these programs.

Many PHAs utilize special purpose vouchers to address the needs of people in their community who are experiencing or are at risk of homelessness. Although each special purpose voucher program carries its own program rules and considerations for program design, all of the programs (except for a subset [Category 1] of NED vouchers) require partnering with other government agencies. In the case of HUD-VASH it is VA, for FUP it

is public child welfare agencies, and for NED Category 2, it is the state Medicaid or health agency or the state Money Follows the Person Demonstration agency.

Strong partnerships are essential to successfully implementing these programs, and improving the effectiveness and outcome in reducing homelessness. PHAs are more likely to be able to qualify for an allocation of special purpose vouchers and to implement these programs effectively if they have the capacity to partner with other systems and/or community-based organizations to link housing and services.

Eligibility

Special purpose vouchers are different from regular Housing Choice Vouchers in that they have been specifically provided by Congress in separate appropriations and are reserved for specific populations.

- Only Veterans experiencing homelessness are eligible for HUD-VASH vouchers.
- FUP vouchers are for families in need of rental assistance to either prevent or end an out-of-home placement for one or more children, or for youth at least 18 years old and not more than 21 years old who left foster care at age 16 or older and who lack adequate housing.
- NED Vouchers are for non-elderly persons or families with disabilities, with a subset of vouchers (Category 2) reserved for people exiting nursing homes or other long-term care institutions.

The success of implementing special purpose vouchers relies on developing strong partnerships with other agencies to pair rental assistance with services.

In addition to these special purpose vouchers, in many communities PHAs have been involved in administering rental assistance for homeless people with disabilities, using funding that was previously awarded through HUD's Shelter Plus Care (S+C) program and now under the Continuum of Care (CoC) program. PHAs that have been administering rental assistance on behalf of a CoC are usually part of ongoing collaborations with nonprofit organizations that pay for and deliver supportive services for homeless people and people with special needs.

Collaborative partnerships, policies, and procedures that have been established to administer this rental assistance often provide PHAs with the experience and relationships that can be expanded or adapted as they implement other specialized housing programs.

Implementation Tips

- Because recipients of these special purpose vouchers are likely to be highly vulnerable people, PHAs may want to consider:
 - requesting the partnering agency's assistance in helping the family navigate the housing process, and/or partnering with community groups to help do so; implementing other strategies to help speed up the lease-up process; and
 - providing reasonable accommodations to ensure these voucher recipients with disabilities are not screened-out of benefiting from the voucher.
- Some special purpose vouchers are allocated to PHAs based on factors that include demonstrated need and capacity to administer voucher assistance. PHAs may be more likely to receive special purpose vouchers if they strengthen the administration of existing voucher programs and work with

representatives of other agencies (such as the VA or child welfare agencies) to document the level of need and to develop partnership agreements to link housing assistance with referral and supportive services networks.

- A state child welfare agency and/or intermediary organization may be able to assist local PHAs by providing a template or model for partnership agreements that can be adapted to reflect the capacity and specific responsibilities of local partners.

Suggested for:

- PHAs with experience with programs such as Shelter Plus Care that have linked tenant-based housing assistance with support services and referral networks.
- PHAs in communities that have established goals related to ending and preventing homelessness for Veterans, families involved in the child welfare system, and youth transitioning out of foster care.

Additional Resources

- [HUD-VASH Best Practices – Version 1.0 A Working Document](#)
- [Promising Strategies for FUP Administrators](#)
- The Corporation for Supportive Housing has created an [on-line PHA Toolkit](#) that contains information and examples of PHAs that have used special purpose vouchers to provide housing linked to support services for persons experiencing homelessness.
- The Technical Assistance Collaborative website provides [a database of PHAs](#) that have received special purpose vouchers targeted to people with special needs.

Example

- **The State of Washington, the State Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) Children’s Administration (CA)** developed a template Memorandum of Understanding to be used by local PHAs, community partner agencies, and regional DSHS CA offices to apply for and implement FUP voucher programs. The template MOU describes roles and responsibilities for each partner agency. After FUP funding was awarded, the MOU was used as a training tool for staff and a reminder for partner agencies about agreements that had been made during the application process, and as a tool for ensuring that participants receive resources that are needed to ensure the program is a success. Since 2008, FUP vouchers have been awarded to seven PHAs in the state of Washington, including King County, Seattle, Clallam County, and Snohomish County.

Partnerships

The affordable housing resources administered by PHAs can be more effective in providing housing access and stability for people experiencing homelessness when implemented in partnership with diverse public, private, community-based, and faith-based organizations and in conjunction with critical local initiatives and efforts to improve systems for ending homelessness.

Coordinated Assessment Systems

Background

“Coordinated entry” or “centralized entry” refers to the concept of ensuring that access to homeless services in a community is streamlined and households experiencing or at-risk for homelessness are able to quickly access the assistance they need and for which they are eligible, without having to call or be turned away from multiple programs.

In some communities, this *coordinated* system is *centralized*, in that there is a single point of entry for accessing all types of homelessness assistance. Other communities do not use a centralized point of entry, but rather have coordinated systems, which may include multiple points of entry, to coordinate access to homeless assistance services and housing and to link people to the most appropriate services and housing interventions.

Communities with coordinated entry systems also utilize “coordinated assessment” strategies to better match people experiencing homelessness to the most appropriate types of housing assistance (such as prevention, rapid re-housing, shelter, and permanent supportive housing) based on an assessment of the needs of households.

In communities that have coordinated assessment systems, homeless assistance programs use a common set of measures or tools for assessing the needs of people seeking homelessness assistance. Therefore, decisions about referrals are based on consistent criteria and a comprehensive understanding of each program’s requirements, target populations, and available openings and services.

HUD is requiring all communities funded through its Emergency Solutions Grant or Continuum of Care program to implement a centralized or coordinated intake and coordinated assessment system.

Coordinated entry describes the process by which individuals and families who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness request assistance. This can take the form of a call center (e.g., 2-1-1), a single facility, such as an emergency shelter or intake center, or multiple access points.

The coordinated assessment process means that, regardless of where people apply for assistance, staff are asking the same questions and using the same criteria to determine eligibility and assess which programs are the best match or fit for each household.

As one of the larger providers of affordable housing in the community, PHAs can be a critical contributor of this process. PHAs can support this process on the front-end by identifying applicants for rental assistance who are experiencing or at-risk of homelessness and encouraging them to also seek assistance through the community’s coordinated entry system.

PHAs can also provide housing opportunities for individuals and families based on referrals from the community’s coordinated entry and centralized assessment process. For example, a PHA can collaborate to identify homeless households that might qualify for a wait-list preference, or the PHA can rely on the coordinated entry process to refer persons who qualify for special purpose vouchers or permanent supportive housing programs that are administered by the PHA and its partners.

Where Can PHAs Do This?

All PHAs can participate in and support their communities' coordinated entry process and use the centralized or coordinated assessment system to identify and refer eligible households for housing assistance.

Who Can PHAs Assist?

Coordinated or centralized entry and coordinated assessment is important for all households experiencing homelessness as it increases the transparency and ease of access to homelessness assistance and ensures that households are matched to the most appropriate types of housing assistance and services model.

Additional Resource

[USICH's Tools Database](#) has resources on coordinated entry and assessment systems.

Examples

- Chicago has implemented a Central Referral System for permanent supportive housing and for permanent housing with short-term support services. The Central Referral System prioritizes people for these housing resources based on responses to the Vulnerability Index and length of homelessness. The **Chicago Housing Authority (CHA)** cross references applicants to the CRS against its waiting lists to identify households that are experiencing homelessness and active on one or more of the CHA lists. This process helps CHA identify its applicants who are currently homeless and in need of supportive housing, which allows them to make more targeted referrals to permanent supportive housing projects that use project-based vouchers provided by CHA. The supportive housing providers work with community partners to reach out to these individuals. Contact information of the applicant, a case manager, and other emergency contacts that is submitted to the CRS is also passed on to the CHA supportive housing provider in order to increase the likelihood of successful contact for a vacant unit.
- The **Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles (HACLA)** collaborated with Home For Good, the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority, County departments, the VA of Greater Los Angeles, and other partners to develop a pilot coordinated entry system for chronically homeless persons in the Skid Row area. Through this effort, the partners developed a standardized assessment tool that prioritizes persons based on length of homelessness and vulnerability and streamlined, universal application forms for permanent supportive housing. In the pilot phase, HACLA and the other partners utilized this process to prioritize clients for some of HACLA's targeted housing choice vouchers, Shelter Plus Care subsidies, project-based voucher-funded permanent supportive housing, and HUD-VASH vouchers. These partners are now implementing plans for expanding the pilot beyond Skid Row and into other communities in the city and county of Los Angeles, with a goal of the coordinated entry system becoming the standardized system through which persons are prioritized for and access all permanent supportive housing programs.
- The executive director of the **Housing Authority of the City of Dallas, Texas** is on the board of the metro Dallas CoC and participates in regional planning efforts related to ending homelessness. Participation in collaborative planning with other community organizations has informed the housing authority's decisions to expand programs and partnerships to facilitate access to permanent housing for homeless people, and to modify tenant screening policies to reduce barriers to housing assistance for persons experiencing homelessness. The housing authority's

board has agreed to dedicate project-based housing vouchers to help develop permanent supportive housing for individuals and families who are experiencing homelessness.

Faith-Based and Community Organizations To Provide Move-In Assistance

Background

When families and individuals experience homelessness, they often do not have funds for security deposits, utility hook-ups, or the household goods and furniture they need to settle into a home when they get housing assistance. Such expenses are not covered by many of the primary publicly funded subsidy programs, but private support for such needs can help the public programs to operate more efficiently and to house people more quickly.

In some cases, households exiting homelessness may be moving into a neighborhood where they do not have friends or family connections. PHA partnerships with faith-based and community organizations can help provide people with the items that are essential to furnishing an apartment or house, and they may offer additional informal support that would help an individual or family to feel welcomed into their new home and community.

Some PHAs have established partnership relationships with faith-based organizations, non-profit service providers, and other community organizations that can provide assistance with move-in costs and access to free or extremely low-cost furniture, bed linens, towels, dishes, cooking supplies, and other items that people need when they move into an apartment or home. In some communities, churches or faith-based organizations “adopt” a family and volunteers contribute the items needed to furnish an apartment. They may also stock kitchen cabinets with some food to welcome their new neighbors.

Faith-based organizations and volunteers who have provided support (such as food, blankets, and other supplies) to people while they are homeless may find that helping support people as they move into their new permanent homes better helps them contribute to ending homelessness.

In other communities, local non-profit organizations operate thrift shops or warehouses where people can select free or low-cost furniture and other household items they need when they are moving into housing.

Where Can PHAs Do This?

All PHAs can establish partnerships with faith-based and community organizations to provide move-in assistance to people exiting homelessness.

Who Can PHAs Assist?

Move-in assistance may be particularly helpful for people who have experienced chronic homelessness, transition aged youth, families fleeing domestic violence, Veterans, and other people experiencing homelessness who do not have furniture or other household items.

Examples

- The **Housing Authority of the City of Dallas** partners with the Metro Dallas Homeless Alliance (MDHA). MDHA solicits donations of furniture in good condition, and partners with the housing

authority to provide furniture when people who have been experiencing homelessness move into housing. Churches in the Dallas area also help by providing linens and other household items.

- The **Minneapolis Public Housing Authority** partners with the Minneapolis VA Medical Center to implement the Hennepin County HUD-VA Supportive Housing (VASH) program for Veterans experiencing homelessness. A partnership with Bridging, a local non-profit furniture bank, provides furniture and household items to Veterans who are using VASH vouchers that are administered by the housing authority.
- The **San Diego Housing Commission** and VA San Diego Healthcare System partnered with the Downtown San Diego Partnership and other partners who raised private funds to help cover move-in costs and household items and furniture for people being housed through targeted sponsor-based vouchers and the HUD-VASH program.

Referrals

Background

As demonstrated in the PIH notice, PHAs can implement a variety of strategies to successfully implement housing assistance programs targeted to people experiencing homelessness and using mainstream housing assistance to help prevent and end homelessness. For example, PHAs can implement special-purpose vouchers, such as HUD-VASH or Family Unification Program (FUP) vouchers, a targeted supportive housing program (such as Shelter Plus Care), or a waiting list preference for homeless applicants.

To make such efforts successful and efficient, PHAs must have processes for consistently receiving applications from eligible households and those processes will be strongest if based upon partnerships between PHAs and organizations that serve people experiencing homelessness.

By establishing a regular referral process, partnering organizations can help create a pipeline of qualified applicants so PHAs can effectively target assistance to homeless households without sacrificing utilization rates or lease-up times. Otherwise PHAs, which face financial pressures to make sure their resources are utilized, may be reluctant to implement programs targeted to homeless people who are most in need of housing assistance. Even those PHAs most committed to the mission of ending homelessness will have their efforts strengthened through community partnerships.

Homeless service providers can help PHAs implement housing assistance programs that use special-purpose vouchers, supportive housing programs, or a homeless preference by identifying eligible individuals and families, assisting with application preparation, and documenting applicants' eligibility and qualifications for prioritizations, such as a prioritization for persons experiencing chronic homelessness. PHAs may limit a homeless preference to applicants referred by partnering organizations.

Identifying and Referring Eligible Applicants

Partnerships between service providers and PHAs can help strengthen preferences and housing assistance programs for people experiencing homelessness in several ways. First, for PHAs that have recently implemented or are considering implementing a homeless preference, special-purpose vouchers, or targeted homeless assistance programs, homeless service providers can help identify households on the existing

waiting list that qualify for assistance. Without these partnerships, PHAs may not know which households on their wait list are experiencing homelessness and meet other criteria for assistance.

Partnering agencies should help advertise changes to PHA wait list status or preferences (e.g., opening a wait list, creating a homeless preference), and the availability of special-purpose vouchers or targeted supportive housing units in shelters, feeding centers, and other programs that serve people experiencing homelessness.

Partnering agencies can also help those already on the wait list update their information and can help those not on the wait list apply for assistance. Additionally, referral agencies can create data sharing agreements with PHAs to identify existing wait list households that meet the homeless preference. This may be accomplished by matching the wait list data with data from Homeless Management Information Systems.

Documenting Program or Preference Eligibility

Partnerships can also help PHAs verify that the individual or family qualifies under a homeless preference, meets the criteria for a special-purpose voucher or targeted supportive housing program, and/or qualifies for prioritizations, such as a prioritization for persons experiencing chronic homelessness. [According to HUD](#), when a PHA establishes a partnership for referrals from a homeless service organization, they may allow the partnering organization to verify the individual's or family's program or preference eligibility, before the individual or family is referred to the PHA. This can serve the dual purpose of relieving the burden on people experiencing homelessness to provide documentation while also filtering out applicants with other means that may be claiming homeless status to decrease their wait time for rental assistance.

Limiting Preferences to Referral Agencies

Finally, PHAs can limit their preferences, special-purpose vouchers, or targeted supportive housing units to people referred by partner organizations. This can be particularly useful for supportive housing partnerships to ensure that the people receiving assistance need the level of services provided by the program. PHAs may create a general or limited preference specifically for people who are referred by a partnering homeless service organization or consortia of organizations.

For example, a PHA could partner with an organization that serves families in shelter to establish a preference or limited preference for families documented to have the longest-term stays in shelters that are unlikely to exit homelessness without a permanent subsidy. However, when implementing such limited preferences to partner organizations, the PHA must be sure to not limit the source of referrals to an agency, organization, or consortia that denies its services to members of any federally protected class under fair housing laws, i.e., race, color, religion, national origin, sex, disability, or familial status.

Where Can PHAs Do This?

Partnerships for referrals should be established with any PHA. There is a clear need for these partnerships even for PHAs that do not yet have a homeless preference or administer special-purpose vouchers or other programs targeted to people experiencing homelessness. Establishing partnerships and referral agreements with PHAs that do not yet have preferences or targeted programs can help document the need for PHAs to serve people experiencing homelessness and will support such PHAs to more quickly and effectively implement new preferences or targeted programs.

Who Can PHAs Assist?

All populations, with a specific focus on chronically homeless people, vulnerable people, and other people with disabilities experiencing homelessness who may need supportive services attached to their rental assistance.

Example

- The San Antonio Housing Authority (SAHA) has a formal partnership with the Center for Healthcare Service (CHCS) to administer a Shelter Plus Care program to serve people with a disability who are experiencing homelessness. The Memorandum of Agreement to formalize the partnership states “SAHA agrees to allocate when available rental subsidies in the way of tenant- based vouchers to eligible individual/families (“Participants”) as referred by the CHCS up to an annual amount of 100 vouchers. As consideration for the allocation of the rental subsidies as hereinbefore described, the CHCS will provide eligibility assessment services as well as intensive case management and treatment services to the Participants referred for rental subsidies.” More information on this partnership is available in CSH’s [PHA Toolkit](#).

Application Assistance

Background

The process for applying for and receiving housing assistance administered by PHAs can be challenging for any applicant household, but is even harder to navigate for individuals and families experiencing homelessness.

Depending upon the specific types of housing assistance and PHA policies regarding waiting list preferences, the application process can involve submitting forms and documentation, showing up for interviews and scheduled appointments, and waiting for weeks, months, or even years before an eligible household receives assistance.

The difficulties of navigating the application and wait list process are among the most commonly cited obstacles PHAs have identified to serving people experiencing homelessness. PHAs with the greatest level of engagement in assisting homeless individuals and families have successfully addressed these barriers through partnerships with service providers.

These partnerships can ensure that people experiencing homeless receive the help to successfully navigate this process and receive housing assistance. Essential roles for partners include:

- helping people experiencing homelessness complete application forms and provide necessary documentation
- maintaining applicants’ eligibility while on the waiting list
- ensuring that applicants with disabilities receive reasonable accommodations when needed

Helping with the Application Process and Documentation

Each PHA has the flexibility to design their own waiting list and application process in accordance with HUD regulations. PHAs are required to document these processes and make them publicly available through their administrative plans.

Programs that serve people experiencing homelessness should ensure that relevant staff have up- to-date information on the application process and waiting list policies of PHAs within their service areas. Staff need to know:

- whether PHAs have separate waiting lists for the Housing Choice Voucher, public housing, and specific project-based voucher programs the preferences for each of these wait lists
- when PHA waiting lists are open or closed. Staff should also be responsible for notifying clients when PHAs open their waiting lists or change their admission preferences

Many PHAs use a preliminary application for households to get on the waiting list for assistance. The preliminary application often contains a minimal amount of information such as name, family size, date of application, race and ethnicity, and whether the applicant qualifies for any local preference. Then, when applicants are selected from the waiting list they complete the full application and provide the necessary documentation to establish their eligibility for assistance and the level of assistance for which they qualify.

Partner organizations can work with homeless applicants to ensure that all the fields in the application form are successfully completed and the applicant provides the appropriate documentation, such as government issued identification, pay stubs, and tax returns. For programs that are targeted or have a preference for people experiencing homelessness, partner organizations can help applicants provide the documentation showing that they meet the eligibility criteria. Partner organizations can also help applicants proactively address any potential barriers an individual or family may have to admission, such as past involvement with the criminal justice system, prior evictions, or debts owed to the PHA.

PHAs cannot approve an application for assistance if it is incomplete or lacks the necessary documentation. When applications are incomplete, PHA staff have to try to follow-up with the applicant and, if that is unsuccessful, they move on to the next applicant drawn from their waiting list. Incomplete applications and missing documentation can be a major barrier to PHAs' ability and willingness to dedicate resources to people experiencing homelessness. Partner organizations that are knowledgeable about the PHA admission process and work closely with people experiencing homelessness are critical to addressing this barrier.

For the HCV program, applicants also must attend an oral briefing to learn about the program and their obligations as participants, how their rent is determined, and how to select an eligible unit with their voucher. PHAs can deny assistance to households for failing to provide necessary identification and employment information or for missing their oral briefing. Partner organizations can work with PHAs to adopt flexible scheduling for people experiencing homelessness and provide transportation assistance to help these applicants attend the necessary appointments to receive and maintain their assistance.

Partner organizations can also work with PHAs to help assess whether there are steps in their application and screening processes and for issuing vouchers that are unnecessary or create significant barriers for people experiencing homelessness being able to successfully receive and utilize their vouchers.

Maintaining Eligibility for Households on the Waiting List

On average, it takes a household more than two years between initially applying for rental assistance and being offered assistance. The wait can be much shorter for applicants eligible for a PHA's established waiting list preferences. The majority of PHAs maintain waiting lists for public housing and rental assistance. To

manage their waiting lists, PHAs can periodically ask households on the waiting list, frequently via mailings, for information or updates to confirm their continued interest in rental assistance.

In accordance with their administrative plans, PHAs can remove from their waiting lists households that do not respond to PHA requests for information or updates. These approaches and policies can create a significant barrier to receiving assistance for people experiencing homelessness who often lack a fixed address and, consequently, have a difficult time receiving mail.

Partner organizations can help address this barrier by designating a point of contact responsible for making sure their clients receive PHA notifications. This contact person, often a case manager, may also have the authority to provide the necessary notifications or updates directly to the PHA to ensure the applicant can remain on the waiting list. Partner organizations can also work with PHAs to develop alternate ways of contacting wait list households who lack a fixed address, such as through a community voicemail system.

Responding to Requests for Reasonable Accommodations

People with disabilities have a right to reasonable accommodations to ensure that they are not denied assistance as a result of their disabilities. In 2004 HUD and the US Department of Justice (DOJ) released a [joint statement to provide technical assistance regarding reasonable accommodations under the Fair Housing Act](#). The joint statement contains examples of the ways in which PHAs and other housing providers may be required to make reasonable accommodations in rules, policies, practices, or services in order to provide equal opportunities for people with disabilities to use housing.

For example, PHAs and other housing providers may reject housing applicants whose tenancy would constitute a “direct threat” to the health and safety of other individuals or result in substantial physical damage to the property of others unless the threat can be eliminated or significantly reduced by reasonable accommodation. People cannot be excluded from housing based upon fear, speculation, or stereotype about a particular disability or persons with disabilities in general. A determination that an individual poses a direct threat must be based upon objective evidence regarding current conduct or a recent history of overt acts, and a housing provider must consider whether the individual has received intervening treatment or medication that eliminates the threat of harm. As a reasonable accommodation, a person with a disability who has a history that includes behavior that would be considered a possible threat can ask the PHA to consider assurances that he or she will receive appropriate counseling or medications that will ensure that there is no threat to the health or safety of other residents.

Additional information about reasonable accommodations in tenant selection is available in [Between the Lines: A Question and Answer Guide on Legal Issues in Supportive Housing](#), which is available from the Corporation for Supportive Housing. Organizations with expertise in helping people with disabilities experiencing homelessness can partner with PHAs to provide a non-adversarial process that ensures applicants receive reasonable accommodations as required by law.

Where Can PHAs Do This?

All communities could benefit from partnerships between PHAs and homeless service providers for application assistance. These partnerships may be particularly valuable for PHAs that have long waiting lists, as well as those that administer programs or preferences that target housing assistance to persons experiencing homelessness. Partnerships that offer assistance with the application process can be an important part of

efforts to improve and speed up the process of connecting housing assistance to people who are experiencing chronic homelessness, or improving utilization of targeted programs such as HUD-VASH.

Who Can PHAs Assist?

All populations. In particular, partner organizations should be aware that people with disabilities experiencing homelessness have additional protections to prevent them from inadvertently being withdrawn from PHA waiting lists. A PHA decision to withdraw from the waiting list the name of an applicant family that includes a person with disabilities is subject to reasonable accommodation in accordance with 24 CFR part 8. If the applicant did not respond to the PHA request for information or updates because of the family member's disability, the PHA must reinstate the applicant in the family's former position on the waiting list.

Providers that are familiar with [the SOAR process](#) for helping people experiencing homelessness apply for Supplemental Security Income (SSI)/Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) benefits should consider adapting lessons learned from that process as they develop partnerships to help people apply for rental assistance.

Additional Resource

Through the HUD-VASH program, PHAs have collaborated with VA medical centers to streamline the voucher application and lease-up process for Veterans experiencing chronic homelessness, and have compiled [a list of best practices](#).

Examples

- The **Dallas Housing Authority** partnered with a non-profit company in Seattle to give applicants access to a community voicemail system. Homeless applicants and other applicants without a fixed address can call into their community voicemail from any number to access their messages and notify the PHA of their continued interest in assistance so they are not dropped from the wait list.
- Several PHAs, including the **Columbus (OH) Metropolitan Housing Authority** and the **Boston Housing Authority**, authorize case managers from homeless service providers to act as a point of contact for homeless applicants. The case managers typically have the relationships and resources to contact these applicants and help them complete their applications and receive assistance when PHA staff are unable to.
- In Washington, DC, for the HUD-VASH program, the City's Department of Human Services (DHS) conducts a pre-eligibility screening of all clients to ensure that they meet the eligibility criteria for the program. The **DC Housing Authority** trained DHS staff on the application process so that DHS can ensure clients' successfully complete the application. A web-based project management tool notifies both DHS and DCHA on changes to clients' application status. The DHS case manager attends the oral briefing with the client and helps guide him or her through the lease-up process.
- To expedite the lease-up process for the most vulnerable, chronically homeless veterans as part of the Project H3 Vets Initiative, the **Phoenix Housing Department** developed a public-private partnership that contracted lease-up functions of the HUD-VASH program to [Housing Operations and Management, Inc. \(HOM, Inc.\)](#), a company that specializes in the management and operations of rental housing assistance and supportive housing programs. The Phoenix VAMC sends referrals of eligible

Veterans directly to HOM, Inc., and staff from that agency determine eligibility for the HUD-VASH vouchers and conduct the HUD-VASH program briefing at which the voucher is issued.

Housing Stabilization Supports and Case Management Services

Background

Housing stabilization supports and case management services can help people who have experienced homelessness become successful tenants and achieve housing stability. PHAs can partner with service providers to deliver supports to households that have been experiencing homelessness prior to receiving housing assistance. Time-limited housing stabilization services can be effective for many families and individuals who have experienced a housing crisis. For people with disabilities who have experienced chronic homelessness, ongoing case management services will likely be needed, although the intensity of their service needs will vary over time.

More intensive supports are often made available when households are first moving from homelessness into housing; many households will need less intensive supports after they have been living in housing for a few months. Partnerships between PHAs and providers of housing stabilization supports and case management services can help to ensure that households will be able to get the supports they need to avoid or resolve a crisis that could otherwise result in a return to homelessness.

Housing stabilization supports are usually time-limited, and services are most intensive at the point when families and individuals exit homelessness and move into permanent housing. Services are often delivered in the participant's home and in the community, and focus on helping people improve their housing-related skills. Housing stabilization services also help people establish or strengthen their connections to community services and other resources, including facilitating the use of informal or "natural" support from family members, friends, faith communities, and others.

Critical Time Intervention (CTI) is an evidence-based model of time-limited case management services that are focused on connecting clients to informal and formal community supports, which can offer assistance to meet individual or family needs for the long term.

Case management services, which are typically longer-term or ongoing and more intensive than housing stabilization services, are an essential component of permanent supportive housing for people with disabilities who have experienced chronic homelessness or have other significant barriers to housing stability. Partnerships that connect PHAs with providers of case management and other behavioral health services can leverage the resources and capacity of mainstream service systems to end long-term homelessness for people with disabilities.

Where Can PHAs Do This?

All PHAs can establish partnerships with providers of housing stabilization supports and case management services.

Who Can PHAs Assist?

Partnerships among PHAs and service providers can be developed with services that are matched to the needs of different groups of people who have experienced homelessness. Some partnerships may be designed to

address the needs of families for time-limited housing stabilization services, while other partnerships may focus on providing ongoing case management and behavioral health care services for people with disabilities who have had long histories of homelessness or more significant barriers to housing stability.

Additional Resource

- **Corporation for Supportive Housing’s PHA Toolkit** describes service partner roles and it includes implementation tips for [getting started](#), including steps to find the right partner and create a partnership agreement. The Toolkit also contains profiles of supportive housing programs that have been implemented by PHAs around the country, working in partnership with community-based providers of housing stabilization supports and case management services.

Examples

- Beginning in 2008, the **Philadelphia Housing Authority** dedicated 200 Housing Choice Vouchers a year to people experiencing long-term street homelessness. Through a partnership with the Philadelphia Department of Behavioral Health, these PHA vouchers are combined with Medicaid-financed case management services delivered by local community-based providers. Between September 2008 and early 2013, this collaboration helped more than 850 people move into permanent supportive housing in Philadelphia. It has also helped to strengthen relationships across city and county agencies working together to end homelessness.
- In Bridgeport, CT, the **Housing Authority of the City of Bridgeport** participates in the Bridgeport Housing First Collaborative. The Collaborative includes partner organizations that have been serving people experiencing or most at-risk of homelessness for more than two decades. The Housing Authority has dedicated Housing Choice Vouchers to serve families experiencing homelessness, and partner organizations in the Collaborative have built relationships with private landlords and developers to create access to safe, attractive, and affordable housing for participating families.
- In Tukwila, Washington, the **King County Housing Authority (KCHA)** partnered with the City of Tukwila, King County, and Sound Mental Health to create Pacific Court, a public housing complex that provides permanent supportive housing to people with disabilities experiencing chronic homelessness. KCHA’s acquisition of the property was part of a coordinated strategy to revitalize a struggling neighborhood, and the partnership with Sound Mental Health ensures that housing is available to some of the community’s most vulnerable residents, with the supportive services they need to achieve stability and reduce their use of crisis services.
- The **Ann Arbor Housing Commission** has entered into memorandums of understanding with three different service providers—the Interfaith Hospitality Network, the Washtenaw Youth Aging Out Coalition (WYAOC), and Ozone House—that have agreed to provide crisis intervention and case management services to young adults aging-out of foster care and families with children experiencing homelessness. These services agreements are linked to a limited preference in which these services providers provide referrals to AAHC of eligible young adults or families and in exchange provide the supportive services to support tenants’ housing stability.

Partnering with Health Centers

Background

Community Health Centers and Health Care for the Homeless (HCH) programs receive federal grants from the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), which is part of the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). These health centers and HCH programs also receive Medicaid reimbursement as Federally Qualified Health Centers. They provide comprehensive primary care services to low-income people in underserved communities, and many health centers often also provide some behavioral health and dental services.

HRSA also administers the Public Housing Primary Care (PHPC) program, which is operated by Community Health Centers in 25 states and Puerto Rico. PHPC programs deliver comprehensive, case-managed, family-based primary care and preventive health care services, including behavioral health. Options for programs include operating a clinic on-site in a public housing development or in an area adjacent to the housing development that offers access to services for residents of several public housing and HUD-assisted housing sites.

Some Community Health Centers, HCH programs and PHPC programs provide health services that are linked to housing assistance administered by PHAs, in programs that are designed to serve people experiencing homelessness and residents of permanent supportive housing.

Many of the residents of public and assisted housing receive health care services from Community Health Centers and PHPC programs. In some communities PHAs have provided space for on-site clinics in public housing developments. Building upon these connections, some PHAs have partnered with health centers to implement programs that are designed to help prevent and end homelessness, and to provide ongoing health care and support services to support housing stability for people with disabilities who have experienced homelessness.

Health Centers and HCH programs also partner with PHAs to assist people who are experiencing homelessness in applying for housing assistance, gathering the documentation needed to complete the application process, finding apartments and negotiating rental agreements with landlords who will accept housing vouchers, and delivering ongoing case management services.

Implementation Tips

PHAs, health centers, and HCH programs often serve the same low-income communities and people, but they speak different languages, have different business practices and organizational cultures, and operate with different funding requirements and program rules. In order to build successful and sustainable partnerships, it is critical for the partners to take time to develop a shared vision and goals, and to learn to appreciate each organization's perspective and funding constraints or incentives. It is also important to provide opportunities for staff members to participate in cross-training in order to understand the procedures each agency uses and better coordinate efforts to help people who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness get and keep housing and access the health care services they need.

Where Can PHAs Do This?

All PHAs can establish partnerships with health centers or HCH programs to serve people experiencing homelessness. Both Home Forward and the Oakland Housing Authority are Moving to Work PHAs, and some aspects of the programs they have implemented (described above) may depend upon the flexibility that is available to these types of PHAs.

Collaborating with a health center to develop a clinic for tenants of public and assisted housing, including PSH tenants, is most likely to be a promising strategy when these tenants live in a neighborhood that offers limited access to other primary care services, and an existing or potential clinic site is located nearby in an easily accessible location.

Examples

- In Portland, Oregon, **Home Forward (formerly the Housing Authority of Portland)** developed [Bud Clark Commons](#), an award-winning development that includes a transitional shelter, day center, and 130 units of permanent supportive housing. In the selection of tenants for the PSH, Home Forward prioritizes individuals using a vulnerability assessment tool. Home Forward partners with four community health clinics that administer the vulnerability assessment to their clients and screen prospective residents for placement in housing, using a housing first approach.
- Working in collaboration with the **Oakland Housing Authority**, Lifelong Medical Care received a PHPC grant to establish a clinic in downtown Oakland CA. The clinic serves residents of nearby public housing developments and HUD-assisted PSH programs. The grant allowed Lifelong Medical Care to significantly expand its capacity to deliver primary care and behavioral health services to PSH tenants, by establishing a full-time clinic in a neighborhood where several residential hotels have been rehabilitated and converted to PSH with ongoing rental assistance provided by programs administered by the Oakland Housing Authority.
- Lifelong Medical Care and the **Oakland Housing Authority** are also participating in the [Oakland PATH Rehousing Initiative \(OPRI\)](#). OPRI is a collaboration of housing and service providers working together to help people move from encampments and homeless shelters into permanent housing using Shelter Plus Care and Housing Choice Vouchers administered by the housing authority, with ongoing supportive services provided by Lifelong and other partner agencies. OPRI also prevents homelessness by serving people who are at risk of homelessness when they exit foster care or the criminal justice system without other housing options.

Partnering with Schools

Background

Schools play important roles in the lives of children and their families, and in creating strong and healthy communities. Schools and Local Education Agencies (LEAs) also have obligations to identify and provide some assistance to students who are experiencing homelessness. Such assistance includes transportation to allow students to continue to attend the same school even if they are staying in shelters or in other arrangements that may be far from where they were living when they enrolled in school.

HUD also strongly encourages collaboration among homeless assistance programs and schools, and requires that each project that receives HUD funding through the Continuum of Care must appropriately coordinate

with schools and community agencies to enroll children and youth in school, and to ensure that the children and youth receive all required and necessary educational services.

Students from families experiencing a housing crisis or homelessness are understandably often struggling with and distracted by the challenges their families are facing. Teachers find it difficult to support student learning when some children do not attend school consistently, are staying in shelters without a quiet place to do homework, and/or may be moving between schools as their families try to secure or maintain stable housing.

PHAs and schools can collaborate to identify and assist children whose families are experiencing homelessness and to support housing stability for low-income families who live in public and assisted housing. By working together to prevent and end homelessness for families, schools and PHAs can strengthen communities and improve educational outcomes for students. This benefits not only the children whose families are experiencing or at risk of homelessness, but it also improves the educational environment for all students.

PHAs that have established a waiting list preference for homeless families can use partnerships with schools to help identify families who qualify for a local preference. By working together, schools and PHAs can connect homeless families to housing assistance.

Some innovative PHAs are partnering with schools to develop targeted initiatives to improve housing stability in neighborhoods of concentrated poverty. These neighborhoods often include many residents of public and assisted housing, as well as a significant number of families experiencing housing instability or homelessness. A partnership between a PHA and a school can help to reduce the high rate of turnover in classrooms, by reducing the number of students who move in and out of schools because their families are experiencing crises that result in homelessness or frequent moves.

Some PHAs are collaborating with schools and other community resources to support comprehensive, place-based approaches to revitalizing neighborhoods and improving outcomes for children and their families. Some of these efforts are supported through program initiatives such as HUD's Choice Neighborhoods initiative and the US Department of Education's Promise Neighborhoods.

These program initiatives take a comprehensive approach to improving neighborhoods and schools that serve large numbers of families living in poverty, and they include a focus on coordinating the delivery of services and supports families need to maintain stable housing, address other needs, and pursue opportunity. PHAs participating in these place-based revitalization efforts are strongly encouraged to adopt policies and program strategies that minimize the risks that families will be displaced or lose housing assistance, in order to prevent homelessness for current residents.

Implementation Tips

HUD and US Department of Education programs operate under the requirements of different federal laws, and they use different criteria or definitions of homelessness for purposes of determining eligibility for assistance.

These differences can create confusion or misunderstanding when PHAs, schools, and other homeless assistance programs seek to collaborate. It is important to take time for partners to find common ground,

develop shared language and values, and agree on priorities and strategies for assisting students and families who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

Where Can PHAs Do This?

All PHAs can develop such partnerships.

Who Can PHAs Assist?

Families with children at risk of experiencing homelessness.

Additional Resources

- USICH and the Departments of Education and Housing and Urban Development produced a joint webinar called [Opening Doors Together: Strategies for Integrating Education and Housing Services](#). Webinar participants discussed ways in which HUD Continuum of Care providers, educators, school social workers, and school homeless liaisons can build relationships and link educational support services and homeless services.
- [The McCarver Elementary School Special Housing Program](#) is a joint effort by the Tacoma Housing Authority and McCarver Elementary School, with support from Pierce County, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and other community partners, to link rental housing assistance to a commitment to educational success for families experiencing homelessness. The program seeks to improve housing stability for families with children and improve the school's ability to provide quality for all students by reducing student turnover.

Examples

- In Harris County, Texas, the PHA and the Texas Homeless Education Office and local schools are partnering to assess and identify families who experiencing homelessness and in need of permanent housing. The **Harris County Housing Authority** has a preference for 100 Housing Choice Vouchers to go to homeless families with school-aged children. Additional case management support for these families is provided by Northwest Assistance Ministries. The Texas Homeless Education Office and Texas Homeless Network encourage collaboration through a variety of strategies including the Texas Interagency Council on Homelessness, a newsletter, annual conference, and regular cross-training to facilitate the development of shared commitments to preventing and ending homelessness for children in the state.
- In Tacoma, Washington, the Tacoma Housing Authority (THA) partners with the Tacoma Public Schools and 30 nonprofit organizations to stabilize and improve McCarver Elementary School in Tacoma's poorest neighborhood. As a result of extensive homelessness and poverty among the families of enrolled children, the student annual transient rate at McCarver has ranged between 100 percent and 179 percent, with accompanying poor school performance. THA's McCarver Elementary School Housing Program, using THA's Moving to Work authority, is providing housing assistance to stabilize 50 homeless families whose 76 children constitute about 20% of McCarver's enrollment. Participating parents commit to keep their children at McCarver, to do what a child's school success requires of parents, and to invest in their own education and employment prospects, with the help of extensive support. The school district has also committed to extensive investments in curriculum

reform for the entire school. Third party evaluation paid for by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation monitors numerous performance measures.

Creating Permanent Supportive Housing

Across the country, a growing number of PHAs are using some of their resources and administering funding awarded through HUD's targeted programs to help create permanent supportive housing (PSH) as a key strategy for ending homelessness. PHAs are using a variety of strategies and creating a range of PSH program models. The primary approaches include:

- Using Project-Based Vouchers to develop Permanent Supportive Housing
- Implementing programs designed to end homelessness using Special Purpose Vouchers
- Administering rental assistance funded through the Continuum of Care

Through partnerships with other funders and public agencies, providers of community based services, and nonprofit affordable housing developers, PHAs can help expand the availability of PSH and target such housing assistance to those most in need. Successful partnerships link housing assistance with the services and supports people need to become successful tenants and neighbors.

- Funders Collaborative
- PHA partnerships with providers of housing stabilization supports and case management services

In addition, some PHAs with Moving to Work designation are using another strategy to create PSH

- "Sponsor-Basing" Housing Vouchers